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SUBJECT: BIOGRAPHIC REPORT: JOSE VICENTE RANGEL: HUGO CHAVEZ'S NEW FOREIGN MINISTER

CLASSIFIED BY THOMAS A. SHANNON, POLITICAL COUNSELOR. REASON: 1.5 (B) AND (D).

JOSE VICENTE RANGEL: VENEZUELA'S NEW FOREIGN MINISTER

1.(U) PRESIDENT-ELECT HUGO CHAVEZ FRIAS NAMED JOSE VICENTE RANGEL AS HIS FOREIGN MINISTER DESIGNATE. THOUGH A LAWYER BY EDUCATION AND A JOURNALIST BY PROFESSION, RANGEL HAS A LONG AND STORIED CAREER IN VENEZUELAN POLITICS. AS A LAW STUDENT, HE LED A STUDENT REVOLT AGAINST THE PEREZ JIMENEZ DICTATORSHIP AND WAS EXILED FOR HIS PARTICIPATION. HE LATER RETURNED TO VENEZUELA AND SERVED FOR NEARLY 30 YEARS IN THE CONGRESS. DURING THIS PERIOD HE HELPED FOUND THE LEFTIST NEWSPAPER, EL CLARIN, WON THE NATIONAL PRIZE FOR JOURNALISM, AND RAN UNSUCCESSFULLY FOR PRESIDENT THREE TIMES (NEVER GARNERING MORE THAN 5.2OF THE VOTE.) EVEN NOW, THE SIXTY-NINE YEAR OLD LEADS AN ACTIVE PROFESSIONAL LIFE, PUBLISHING COLUMNS IN THE NEWSPAPERS EL DIARIO AND EL UNIVERSAL, AND HOSTING A POPULAR SUNDAY TELEVISION OPINION PROGRAM.

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

2.(U) BORN IN CARACAS ON JULY 10, 1929, RANGEL FIRST EXPERIENCED POLITICAL TURMOIL IN 1935, WHEN HIS FATHER, A STAUNCH SUPPORTER OF DICTATOR JUAN VICENTE GOMEZ, WAS FORCED TO FLEE VENEZUELA FOR COLOMBIA UPON GOMEZ'S DEATH. AT THE AGE OF SIXTEEN, WHILE ATTENDING SCHOOL IN BARQUISIMETO, HE BECAME POLITICALLY ACTIVE AFTER LISTENING TO JOVITO VILLALBA OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLICAN UNION (URD) SPEAK. INSPIRED, HE JOINED THE YOUTH SECTION OF THE URD.

3.(U) AFTER HIGH SCHOOL, HE ENROLLED IN THE UNIVERSITY OF THE ANDES IN MERIDA TO PURSUE A DEGREE IN LAW, BUT LATER TRANSFERRED TO THE CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF VENEZUELA IN CARACAS. HE DID NOT, HOWEVER, COMPLETE HIS STUDIES. IN 1953, ALONG WITH CHEITO HERRERA OROPEZA, LUIS HERRERA CAMPINS (FUTURE PRESIDENT AND SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY LEADER), AND EDUARDO GONZALEZ, RANGEL LED A STUDENT PROTEST AGAINST THE CORRUPTION OF THE PEREZ JIMENEZ GOVERNMENT. THE PROTEST LED TO RANGEL'S OWN EXILE TO CHILE AND SPAIN. HIS EXILE HAD A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON HIS LIFE IN TWO AREAS. POLITICALLY, HIS TIME IN EXILE HARDENED HIS POSITION AGAINST CORRUPTION AND HIS VIEWPOINT ON GOVERNMENT. PERSONALLY, HE MET AND MARRIED ANA AVALOS, A CHILEAN SCULPTRESS, TO WHOM HE IS STILL MARRIED (WITH TWO CHILDREN) AND TO WHOM HE CLAIMS TO WRITE A NEW POEM EVERY DAY. RANGEL RETURNED TO VENEZUELA IN 1958 FOLLOWING THE FALL OF PEREZ JIMENEZ AND WAS APPOINTED TO THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF THE FEDERAL DISTRICT, AND THEN WAS ELECTED TO THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES.

POLITICAL TURMOIL

4.(U) RANGEL'S POLITICAL ACTIVITIES INCREASED IN THE SIXTIES. IN 1962, AS A MEMBER OF THE URD, HE WAS NAMED PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION ON INTERNAL POLICY OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, AND WAS REELECTED TO THE CHAMBER IN 1963. WHEN RAUL LEONI OF DEMOCRATIC ACTION (AD) BECAME PRESIDENT IN 1964, LEONI, JOVITO VILLALBA OF THE URD, AND ARTURO USLAR PIETRI OF THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT (FND) AGREED TO FORM A NATIONAL POLITICAL FRONT - CALLED "WIDE BASE" -TO INSURE THE GOVERNABILITY OF VENEZUELA. RANGEL VEHEMENTLY DISAGREED WITH URD'S PARTICIPATION IN THE FRONT AND LEFT THE PARTY.

5.(C) RANGEL BEGAN HIS FORMAL ASSOCIATION WITH SOCIALISM AT THAT TIME AND ALONG WITH SOME OTHER EX-URD LEADERS FORMED THE NATIONALIST POPULAR VANGUARD (VPN). DURING THIS PERIOD, RANGEL DEVELOPED A WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH GUERRILLA ORGANIZATIONS. HIS OVERT POLITICAL ACTIVITIES WERE SEEN BY HIS ENEMIES AS A FRONT FOR CLANDESTINE ORGANIZATIONS. IN 1966, WISHING TO UNIFY THE DISPARATE LEFTIST PARTIES, HE JOINED THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY OF NATIONALISTIC INTEGRATION (PRIN). THE LOFTY UNIFICATION GOALS WERE NEVER ACHIEVED AND THE PARTY COLLAPSED AFTER THREE YEARS. DURING THIS PERIOD, RANGEL MET AND BECAME FRIENDS WITH LUIS MIQUILENA (NEWLY-APPOINTED MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR IN THE CHAVEZ CABINET.) THE TWO FOUNDED THE NEWSPAPER, EL CLARIN, WHICH WAS THE MOUTHPIECE OF THE VENEZUELAN LEFT.

PRESIDENTIAL ASPIRATIONS UNFULFILLED

6.(U) THROUGH IT ALL, RANGEL MAINTAINED HIS POSITION IN THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES. IN 1973 AS THE MOVEMENT TOWARD SOCIALISM PARTY (MAS) CANDIDATE, AND WITH LUIS MIQUILENA AS HIS CAMPAIGN MANAGER, HE RAN FOR PRESIDENT. UNFORTUNATELY FOR RANGEL, HIS CANDIDACY NEVER STRUCK A CHORD WITH THE PEOPLE, AND HE FINISHED A DISTANT FOURTH (4.3) BEHIND WINNER CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ (48.7). UNDAUNTED BY HIS SHOWING IN THE 1973 ELECTIONS, HE RAN AGAIN FOR PRESIDENT UNDER THE MAS FLAG IN 1978 (THIRD PLACE WITH 5.2) AND AGAIN IN 1983 (FOURTH PLACE WITH 3.3) AS THE NEW ALTERNATIVE PARTY (NA) CANDIDATE.

THE CAP CONNECTION

7.(U) RANGEL AND CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ (CAP) HAVE A STRONG AND IRONIC POLITICAL CONNECTION, TIED TO TWO SCANDALS. IN 1980, CAP'S POLITICAL ENEMIES WANTED HIM REMOVED FROM THE SCENE. HAVING JUST COMPLETED HIS TERM AS PRESIDENT, CAP WAS THEN SENATOR-FOR-LIFE. DURING HIS PRESIDENCY, THE GOVERNMENT HAD BOUGHT A REFRIGERATED FISHING BOAT -- THE SIERRA NEVADA -- FROM NORWAY AT AN INFLATED PRICE. BECAUSE THIS MISMANAGEMENT OCCURRED DURING CAP'S PRESIDENCY, HIS ENEMIES WANTED HIM HELD LEGALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MALFEASANCE, AND SOUGHT TO IMPEACH AND REMOVE HIM FROM THE SENATE. CONGRESSIONAL IMPEACHMENT ACTION FELL ONE VOTE SHORT. THE ONE VOTE WAS THAT OF JOSE VICENTE RANGEL, WHO ABSTAINED, AND SAVED CAP'S POLITICAL CAREER. RANGEL EXPLAINED HIS ABSTENTION BY SAYING "THE SIERRA NEVADA DEAL WAS UNDOUBTEDLY IMMORAL", BUT NOT AN IMPEACHABLE OFFENSE.

8.(C) QUESTIONS WERE RAISED ABOUT RANGEL'S ABSTENTION AND THE ACQUITTAL OF CAP. RANGEL'S POLITICAL ENEMIES CLAIMED THAT CAP DIRECTLY PAID OFF RANGEL. A MORE SORDID VERSION HAS ALSO CIRCULATED. ACCORDING TO THE STORY, RANGEL'S WIFE WAS INVOLVED WITH A WELL-KNOWN GUERRILLA IN ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES. IN EXCHANGE FOR HIS ABSTENTION, THE STORY GOES, CAP INTERVENED AND STOPPED HER PROSECUTION.

9.(U) NINE YEARS LATER, RANGEL, WORKING AS AN INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALIST HELPED UNCOVER THE SCANDAL THAT LED TO CAP'S IMPEACHMENT AND IMPRISONMENT. RANGEL DISCOVERED THAT DURING CAP'S SECOND TERM AS PRESIDENT (1988 - 1993,) 250 MILLION BOLIVARES (APPROX. \$16 MILLION) WERE SECRETLY AND ILLEGALLY FUNNELED THROUGH THE SECRETARIAT OF THE PRESIDENCY TO FINANCE THE FORMATION OF NICARAGUAN PRESIDENT VIOLETA CHAMORRO'S SECURITY FORCE. IN THE COURSE OF PASSING THE MONEY, THE BOLIVARES WERE EXCHANGED FOR

DOLLARS AT A VERY FAVORABLE RATE, SUPPOSEDLY ALLOWING CAP TO SIPHON OFF A LARGE SUM OF MONEY. ALTHOUGH, CAP MAINTAINED HIS INNOCENCE, THIS TIME NOBODY CAME TO HIS RESCUE AND HE WAS REMOVED FROM OFFICE.

SEMI-RETIREMENT

10.(U) IN THE LATE EIGHTIES, RANGEL RECEIVED MORE ATTENTION FIGHTING INSTITUTIONAL CORRUPTION. DURING THE LUSINCHI PRESIDENCY, RANGEL REPORTED THAT THE MILITARY PLANNED TO PURCHASE OBSOLETE OR DAMAGED EQUIPMENT AT INFLATED PRICES. HE WAS DETAINED AND INTERROGATED TWICE BY MILITARY INTELLIGENCE (DIM), IN AN ATTEMPT TO INTIMIDATE HIM. THE ACTIONS BY DIM ONLY INSPIRED HIM TO PRINT MORE STORIES. IN THE END, HOWEVER, NO PROOF WAS EVER UNCOVERED TO SUPPORT RANGEL'S ALLEGATIONS, AND THE MILITARY BOUGHT THE EQUIPMENT.

11.(U) RANGEL HAS SPENT HIS RECENT YEARS HARD AT WORK, WRITING A WEEKLY COLUMN IN EL DIARIO AND EL UNIVERSAL AND HOSTING A POPULAR TELEVISION OPINION PROGRAM. IN AUGUST 1992, RANGEL'S MOST INTERESTING BROADCAST WAS NEVER AIRED. SEVEN MONTHS AFTER HUGO CHAVEZ'S UNSUCCESSFUL COUP ATTEMPT, RANGEL VIDEOTAPED A PRISON INTERVIEW WITH CHAVEZ. A MILITARY JUDGE PROHIBITED THE BROADCAST OF THE SHOW AT THE LAST MINUTE. RANGEL COUNTERED THIS MOVE BY INVITING JOURNALISTS INTO HIS HOME FOR A PRIVATE SCREENING OF THE VIDEO, PLAYED AT THE SCHEDULED AIR TIME OF HIS SHOW.

12.(C) RANGEL ENJOYS MAINTAINING A HIGH PROFILE AND HAS BEEN CALLED THE MOST SEEN AND HEARD JOURNALIST IN VENEZUELA. LIKE HIS GOOD FRIEND AND POLITICAL COUNTERPART LUIS MIQUILENA, RANGEL HAS NURTURED HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH CHAVEZ IN THE YEARS SINCE THE COUP ATTEMPT. HE SEES IN CHAVEZ A KINDRED SPIRIT WHO UNDERTOOK A QUIXOTIC STRGGL E AGAINST A CORRUPT GOVERNMENT SYSTEM. FOLLOWNG CHAVEZ'S RELEASE FROM PRISON IN 1994, RANGEL SED HIS NEWSPAPER COLUMNS AND HIS TV PROGRAM TO ROMOTE CHAVEZ'S CAMPAIGN FOR THE PRESIDENCY. HIS SUPPORT FOR CHAVEZ' HOWEVER, IS NOT BLIND OR SYCPHANTIC. HE HARSHLY CRITICIZED CHAVEZ FOR HIS FAMUS "FRY ADECO HEADS IN OIL" THREAT, AND USED HISNEWSPAPER COMMENTARY TO LECTURE CHAVEZ ON THE IMORTANCE OF USING PUBLIC OFFICE TO PROMOTE POLITICAL CHANGE, NOT TO CONDUCT VENDETTAS AGAINST POLITICL ENEMIES. RANGEL ONCE TOLD POLOFF, "CHAVEZ IS OT THE IDEAL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, BUT HE IS TE ONLY ONE WE HAVE."

13.(C) RANGEL'S SELECTIONAS FOREIGN MINISTER WAS A SURPRISE. HIS NAME HAD BEEN FLOATED FOR THIS POSITION, BUT HE HAD RULED OT ANY PARTICIPATION IN THE GOVERNMENT, SAYING HE DID NOT WANT TO GIVE UP HIS PRIVILEGED, INDEPENDENT POSITION AS A JOURNALIST. IT WAS ALSO RUMORED THAT HE HAD HEALTH PROBLEMS AND DID NOT FEEL UP TO THE RIGORS OF WORK AS FOREIGN MINISTER. NEVERTHELESS, HIS LOYALTY TO CHAVEZ, AND HIS FORTHRIGHT NATURE WERE ENOUGH TO CONVINCE CHAVEZ TO INSIST THAT HIS MENTOR ACCEPT THE FOREIGN MINISTER POSITION.

14.(C) RANGEL'S LACK OF PRACTICAL INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE IS NOT SEEN BY VENEZUELAN COMMENTATORS AS A HINDERANCE. HIS APPOINTMENT WAS GREETED POSITIVELY BY FOREIGN MINISTER BURELLI AND OTHERS, ALL OF WHOM REMARKED ON RANGEL'S LONG PUBLIC CAREER AND HIS REPUTATION FOR INTEGRITY.

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